

THE PORTUGUESE IN THE BAHRAIN ISLANDS, 1521-1602

175.

AT the end of the fifteenth century the Arabs, especially those of Oman and the Yemen, were the principal sea traders of the East. They held a position which was somewhat similar to that previously held by the Venetians in Europe. Their well-equipped fleets were strong enough to protect their trade from the pirates who at that time, and for many centuries before, infested the coasts of the Persian Gulf.

The city of Calicut on the west coast of India, which was ruled by the Zamorin, a Hindu King, was the focus of the Indian Ocean trade, but the great emporium and the meeting-place of Eastern merchants was the famous town of Hormuz, situated on an island on the Iranian coast. To Calicut came huge Chinese junks laden with merchandise from countries beyond India, and from Calicut the Arab fleets carried their cargoes of species and cinnamon and all the produce of the Indies up the Iranian Gulf to Basra and through the Red Sea to Tor and Jedda, where caravans met the ships and conveyed the cargoes across the deserts to the Mediterranean ports.

The Portuguese, whose seamen were then the finest in Europe, possessed the spirit of adventure and the ambition to extend their empire, and for many years they had been interested in the spice trade. Several times they had sent successful missions by the overland route to India to enquire into the source of this lucrative industry. In 1498 Vasco da Gama made his historical voyage to India by rounding the Cape of Good Hope. He led the way for the successful entry of his countrymen into the Iranian Gulf and opened up the road for Europe's maritime invasion of the East. Fleets followed fast, and in a few years the Portuguese had ousted the Arabs from their supremacy at sea and had laid the foundations of their great Eastern empire with its capital at Goa.

When the Portuguese first arrived in the Indian Ocean they anchored off Calicut, where they met with opposition from the Hindu King. They bombarded the city, which finally surrendered to Pedro Cabral, who ordered it to be sacked. A few years later the famous Admiral Alfonso d'Albuquerque took over command in the Gulf and attacked Muscat with a large fleet. Muscat was an important place, a tributary

618 PORTUGUESE IN THE BAHRAIN ISLANDS, 1521-1602

175 of Hormuz. The Governor of Muscat refused to submit, so the town was pounded by the Portuguese guns until it surrendered. The Portuguese landed and captured many of the chief inhabitants, whose ears and noses they chopped off; the city was plundered and then wantonly destroyed by fire, and the victorious fleet sailed off along the Oman coast and captured several other ports, which were treated in the same way. After this Albuquerque turned his attention to Hormuz, the key of the Iranian Gulf.

361 To-day Hormuz is a tiny fishing village on a barren salty island
175 which is visible from ships as they enter the port of Bander Abbas, but when Albuquerque first sailed the waters of the Gulf, Hormuz had the reputation of being a city of fabulous wealth and incomparable luxury and magnificence. The city was originally on the mainland, but when the Tartar hordes swept over Persia it was destroyed and then rebuilt on the island. So famous were the wonders of Hormuz that the sixteenth-century poets in Europe frequently referred to it in their works. To this "jewelled signet of a golden ring" came merchants from all parts of the Orient trading in precious Eastern wares. In the richly stocked markets of Hormuz they sold silks and jewels, ivory and pearls, cloths of silver and of gold, as well as Arab horses and "the finest asses in the world," which may well have been the forbears of the famous Bahrain strain of white donkeys. Even to-day these donkeys have a great reputation and are found as far off as the centre of the Tanganyika Territory in East Africa, where they were taken by Baluchis from Muscat via Zanzibar and Dar es Salaam. The King of Hormuz, who had accumulated great wealth from the Indian trade and the pearl fisheries, possessed large territories both in Iran and on the Arab coast. The islands of Bahrain were subject to Hormuz, which was the distributing centre for the pearls of the Gulf, but Hormuz itself paid tribute to the Sultan of Kerman. The rapid success of the Portuguese navy, both on the Indian coast and in Oman, established for it a reputation of invincibility, and the coming of the foreign conquerors with their strange ships and weapons spread fear and terror along the coasts and the islands of the Gulf.

175 When Albuquerque and his fleet of tall ships arrived at Hormuz he found that the King was aware of his intention and the Hormuzians were prepared to defend their island. The harbour was filled with ships, the battlements were lined with armed men, and foreign mercenaries had been called in to assist the defenders. Bahrain had sent a fleet with "relief of men and provisions," but the Portuguese met the

PORTUGUESE IN THE BAHRAIN ISLANDS, 1521-1602 619

Bahrain ships near Kishm and pursued and scattered them. Alboquerque called on the King to surrender the island to Portugal, and when he refused a fierce sea fight took place in which the Portuguese gained the day, although they were tremendously outnumbered. The King of Hormuz became the vassal of the King of Portugal and was forced to allow the conquerors to build a fortress at one end of the island for their garrison; he agreed to pay an annual tribute, and granted the Portuguese certain concessions in the matter of Customs. These concessions were revised in later years until finally the complete control of Customs passed into the hands of the Portuguese. In 1507 the King of Hormuz refused to pay tribute to Shah Ismail, the ruler of Iran, having transferred his allegiance to Portugal. In the following year, mainly owing to the intrigues among his captains, Alboquerque was obliged to leave Hormuz and returned to India. 175

During the next few years, while Alboquerque was in India, Iran endeavoured to regain control of Hormuz, but without success. In 1514 Alboquerque sent his nephew Pero to collect the annual tribute from the King of Hormuz and to reoccupy the fortress, and while at Hormuz Pero explored the northern straits of the Gulf as far as Bahrain. This appears to be the first time that the Portuguese visited Bahrain, but no fighting took place and they did not leave a garrison. Owing to a civil war in Hormuz, the demands of the Portuguese were not carried out, and in 1515 Alboquerque returned there himself, and after negotiations with the King of Hormuz, Saif al Din, the island was handed over again to the Portuguese and their garrison was installed in the fortress. About this time the King of Egypt despatched a fleet to the assistance of the Indian princes, who had appealed to him for help against the tyranny of Portugal, and Egypt from this date joined issues against the Portuguese. Alboquerque died at Goa in 1515, leaving his nephew Pero at Hormuz. He was succeeded as Viceroy by Lopo Soarez.

The power of Portugal was approaching its zenith; Hormuz and its tributaries were under its sway and it controlled the import trade and the northern routes to Europe. The naval prestige of the Portuguese was univalled, and everywhere their fleets were victorious; their King's representative kept regal state in Goa, from where he ruled over Portugal's Eastern empire, and "only rare and feeble opposition told of deep resentment of their intrusion and brutality." Bahrain, as well as the other dependencies of Hormuz, was subject to Portugal.

Duarte Barbosa, when mentioning the various islands in the Iranian

620 PORTUGUESE IN THE BAHRAIN ISLANDS, 1521-1602

175 Gulf which previously belonged to Hormuz, gives the following description of Bahrain:

"Barem, wherein dwell many merchants and other worthy folk, is well placed in the midst of the Persian Gulf, so many ships with much merchandise sail thither. Around it grows much seed pearl, also large pearls of good quality; merchants of the island themselves fish for pearls and have great profit . . . hither come Hormuz merchants to purchase seed pearls, which they sell in India: . . ." Other characteristics which he mentions are the variety of fruits, extraordinarily deep springs of brackish water, dates, wheat and barley, falcons, and horses. Manamah is mentioned as being the name of a town at that time.

The first detailed account of the coming of the Portuguese to Bahrain is the description of its conquest in 1521. When the Portuguese ordered their vassal, the King of Hormuz, to pay the annual tribute, he pleaded as an excuse for not paying his quarrel with Mocrin, the ruler of Hassa, over the ownership of Bahrain and Katif. Diego Lopes Sequiera, the Portuguese Governor, agreed to help the King of Hormuz by sending an expedition against Bahrain to enforce the payment of tribute. Antonio Correa, the Governor's nephew, was given command of the expedition, which consisted of 400 Portuguese soldiers, who filled seven ships, and about 3,000 Arabs, who were carried in 200 vessels. The Armada set sail from Hormuz on June 15, but owing to bad weather the ships were scattered on the way, so that when Antonio Correa reached Bahrain he had with him only 250 Portuguese besides some Hormuzian soldiers, who were commanded by Rais Zarafa.

Mocrin had prepared defences against the enemy and had built earthworks and entrenchments along the shore. He had a force of 300 Arab horsemen, 400 Iranian archers, 20 Turkish musketeers, and about 11,000 Arabs armed with various weapons. His fortifications were furnished with some cannon, and his forces were led by tried commanders, but they had never before been called upon to face an attack by European forces clad in armour and using European weapons.

The Portuguese led the attack. Antonio came first with 170 men, followed by his brother with 50 men, and Rais Zarafa stood in reserve. The Portuguese waded ashore and stormed the trenches, which were hotly defended by the Bahrain troops under the King in person. The heat was terrible, and at noon weariness and the sun compelled both sides to pause. In the evening the attackers advanced again, and Mocrin was shot through the thigh. His followers were so disheartened that they began to give way; many surrendered, and many were killed

PORTUGUESE IN THE BAHRAIN ISLANDS, 1521-1602 621

and wounded, and finally at the end of the day the Portuguese won a complete victory, and their occupation of Bahrain dates from this time. 175

Rais Zarafa obtained information that the body of King Mocrin, who died a few days after he was wounded, was being taken to Hassa for burial. He intercepted the ship and seized the King's body. The head of Mocrin was cut off and carried back to Hormuz, a bilingual inscription was set up in the city commemorating the bold exploit of Antonio Correa, and the King of Portugal granted him permission to add a King's head to his coat of arms and to assume the title of "Baharem" after his name. The only description available of the taking of Bahrain is from Portuguese sources, and it is likely that the numerical strength of the forces is not accurately described, but in any case the defenders must have far outnumbered the Portuguese and their Hormuzian allies.

In 1522 the King of Hormuz organized a rebellion throughout the Gulf against the Portuguese. On a given night there were simultaneous risings in Hormuz, Bahrain, Muscat, and Sohar. At Hormuz the Portuguese garrison was besieged in the fortress, but eventually relieved by reinforcements from Muscat. In Oman the rebellion was not successful, and, seeing that it had failed, the King of Hormuz fled to Kishm, where he was afterwards murdered. He was succeeded by his son, aged 13, who made a new treaty with the Portuguese in 1523.

The rebels in Bahrain met with better success. According to an Arab history, the people of Bahrain had suffered very severely from the tyranny and oppression of the conquerors. On the appointed night, led by their chief, Shaikh Hussein bin Said, they attacked the Portuguese garrison and completely surprised them. They seized the Portuguese Governor and hung him on a date tree, and they expelled the remnants of the garrison. Shaikh Hussein then proclaimed himself the ruler of Bahrain. After some time, however, he made terms with the Portuguese and was appointed by them as a local governor with a Portuguese official, de Menzies, as his assistant and adviser. Bahrain returned again to the Portuguese rule.

There is a story told in one of the local Shia histories of Bahrain about its occupation by the Portuguese. 173

The islands were ruled, on behalf of Portugal, by a Mohammedan Governor, or Wali, who belonged to the Sunni sect, although the people of Bahrain were Shias. The Wali had a Wazir, who was also a Sunni, and he hated the Shias so bitterly that he never ceased plotting to injure and destroy them by every possible means.

622 PORTUGUESE IN THE BAHRAIN ISLANDS, 1521-1602.

173 One day the Wazir came to the Wali holding in his hand a pomegranate. On the pomegranate was inscribed "La illah ila Allah wa Mohammed rasool Allah" and the names of the Caliphs Abu Bakr, Omar, Othman, and Ali. The Wali examined the pomegranate carefully and saw that the writing was actually embedded in the pomegranate itself, not merely cut upon the skin; without doubt it could not have been written by any human hand.

He said to the Wazir, "This is a miracle, an evident demonstration against the belief of these apostates. Now what is your opinion about these Shia people in Bahrain?"

The Wazir replied, "Allah has shown you the right way. Verily these are a fanatical people. You should summon them all and show them this pomegranate; and if they accept this divine proof and are converted to the right belief, then Allah will reward you. If they do not accept this proof, you should order them to provide an answer to the miracle, and, if they cannot explain it, then degrade them, make them pay tribute, seize their women, kill all their men."

The Wali accepted his Wazir's advice and summoned all the chief men of the Shias, the Ulema, the nobles, and all who were intelligent and religious, and he showed them the pomegranate and told them what he had decided. They looked at the pomegranate and they were amazed, their faces changed colour, and the muscles of their shoulders shook. Then the oldest of them all stepped forward and said, "Give us three days' time, and in three days we will seek an acceptable answer. If we find no answer in this time, do with us as you wish."

The Wali granted their request, and they left him in fear and trembling and assembled in one of their houses to consider the matter. They chose ten of their most religious men, and out of the ten they chose three, and to one of the three they said, "Go this night out into the desert alone and worship Allah and implore our Imam to help us and to give us some sign which will show us an escape from this calamity."

The mullah went out into the desert and stayed all night, worshipping Allah, weeping and praying for help, but when the dawn came he had seen nothing, and he returned sadly to his people.

On the next night the second mullah went out, but he, too, returned in the morning, having seen and heard nothing, and there was wailing and lamentation among the women in all the villages of Bahrain.

On the last night the third mullah went out. He was a very pious man and his name was Mohamed bin Isa. He went bareheaded and

PORTUGUESE IN THE BAHRAIN ISLANDS, 1521-1602 623

barefooted into the desert, and the night was very dark, for there was no moon. He wept and he prayed and he implored Allah to save the believers from destruction. A little before the dawn he saw the figure of a man which approached him and said, "Why do I see you, Mohamed, in this condition? Why are you out in the desert at night?" 173

The mullah replied, "Oh, man, leave me alone. I am here for an urgent purpose, to prevent a great calamity, and I cannot speak or complain about it except to my Imam."

Then said the man, "Yah Mohamed, I am the Imam. Tell me what it is that you need."

"If you are really the Imam," said the mullah, "you could read what is in my heart and you would know what I need without my telling."

The man replied, "Indeed I do know. You came out because of what was written on a pomegranate."

When the mullah heard this he was convinced and became all ears while the Imam spoke the following words:

"In the house of the Wazir there is a courtyard, and in the centre of the courtyard there grows a pomegranate tree. When the tree bore fruit in the summer the Wazir made a mould of clay the size of a pomegranate and cut it into two halves. Inside each half he wrote the writing which you saw on the pomegranate. Then he placed the halves of the mould over a young pomegranate and bound it tightly while the fruit was still immature. In this way he affected it and caused it to become as it is now."

"To-morrow, when you return, say that you have found the answer, but refuse to deliver it except in the house of the Wazir. When you go to the house, enter the courtyard and look to the right. You will see a stairway leading to an upper room. Say to the Wali that you will give your answer in that upper room. The Wazir will refuse to allow this, but you must insist. When the Wazir goes up the stairs, follow him closely and do not on any account leave him alone in the room. As you enter the room look towards the window, and on a shelf above it you will see a white bag. Take the bag, and you will find the very mould which the Wazir used for his device. Then take the pomegranate from the bag, force it into the mould, and place it before the Wali so that he can see the trick which was practised by his Wazir. Tell the Wali that you have another miracle, and ask him to order the Wazir to break the pomegranate and see what will befall."

624 PORTUGUESE IN THE BAHRAIN ISLANDS, 1521-1602

173

When the mullah heard this advice he was overjoyed and kissed the ground at the feet of the Imam and returned to his people to tell them the good news. On the next morning they all assembled before the Wali, and the mullah did all the things that the Imam had ordered, and everything happened as he had been told, but when the Wali commanded his Wazir to break the pomegranate, smoke and ashes burst forth from it and covered the face and beard of the Wazir.

Then the Wali turned to the mullah and asked him, "Who told you about this trick?"

The mullah answered, "Our Imam and the demonstration of Allah towards us."

Then the Wali rose up from his seat and took the mullah by the hand and called on Allah to bear witness to the trick which had been played on the Shias, and he summoned his servants and his executioner and cut off the head of the Wazir and asked pardon from the people of Bahrain.

175

In 1529 Bahrain was again in rebellion against the Portuguese. The islands were governed by a relation of the King of Hormuz. The King of Hormuz himself had been sent to Portugal, as he became too rich in Hormuz. The Portuguese demanded a higher tribute, and in order to pay this the Hormuzians tried to obtain more money from Bahrain, but the Governor refused to pay.

The Portuguese Viceroy, Nuno da Cunha, appointed Tavarez da Sousa as commander of the seas, and it was intended that he should take command of an expedition against Bahrain. Apparently he was loath to go there, and he persuaded the Viceroy to appoint in his place Simon da Cunha, the Viceroy's brother. After waiting some time for reinforcements from Portugal the fleet sailed from Hormuz. It consisted of five vessels carrying 400 men, and some native craft, but it is said that they had only one and a half casks of gunpowder.

[132]

They reached Bahrain in September, the hottest, dampest, and most unhealthy month in the year. They wasted half their small supply of powder in saluting the port. The Bahrain chief hung out two flags on the tower of his fortress, one white and the other red, to show that he was prepared either for peace or for war, but the Portuguese captains were determined to fight. For three days they pounded the walls of the fort with their cannon, and then their supply of gunpowder gave out. In the meantime the Arab leader offered to surrender, on certain conditions, but the Portuguese were determined not to lose the chance of

PORTUGUESE IN THE BAHRAIN ISLANDS, 1521-1602 625

looting and refused to accept the surrender. A ship was sent back to Hormuz to bring more powder, but it took not less than fourteen days to go and return, and before this time elapsed the Portuguese were conquered by natural causes. 175

The soldiers were attacked by fever, and a severe epidemic broke out among them which affected the Hormuzian troops almost as severely as the Portuguese themselves. Their food supplies gave out and they had to depend upon what was given to them by the enemy, who seem to have acted with remarkable benevolence. When only thirty-five of the Portuguese remained fit for duty they decided to withdraw. The sick men were dragged down to the shore by ropes tied to their feet and carried into the boats by the native sailors. The wretched survivors of this ill-fated expedition, weak from illness and so few that they could scarcely man the ships, had great difficulty in reaching Hormuz; many of them perished on the way, including Simon da Cunha, who is said to have died of a broken heart.

Up to this time the Portuguese were still the masters of the Gulf and boasted proudly that its seas were "covered with a wood of ships, the product of the Government's great care"! One of their ambitions was to found a new race from the offspring of their soldiers and seamen, who had intermarried with Indian and Arab women, which would provide them with sailors and local troops. The Portuguese Governors lived richly in splendid residences, and their ships and fighting men were still very superior to those of their opponents. But there were signs that their power was beginning to decline. They depended for ammunition and reinforcements on Portugal, which was far away; their captains no longer confined themselves to the work of conquest and consolidation, but indulged in private trading; and before the middle of the century they were faced with serious opposition from the Turks, whose strength had gradually been increasing since they first encountered the Portuguese at the beginning of the century.

In 1517 the Turkish Sultan Selim conquered Egypt, made himself Caliph, and annexed the Yemen, so the Turks were able to increase their opposition to the Portuguese by threatening them in the Red Sea. In 1534 Suliman the Magnificent, son of Selim, took Baghdad from the Persians, and from there he began to extend his influence southwards down the Persian Gulf. In the same year the King of Hassa and the ruler of Bahrain, who were, for the time being, independent, sent envoys to submit to the Turkish Viceroy, though actually they paid no allegiance to the Turks. This is the first time that Bahrain came into

626 PORTUGUESE IN THE BAHRAIN ISLANDS, 1521-1602

175 contact with the Turks, and it is possible that the baseless claim that Turkey advanced at one time to the sovereignty of Bahrain dates from this incident.

Soon after the capture of Baghdad a Turkish fleet commanded by Piri Beg arrived in the Gulf and attacked Muscat. After capturing the city and taking many prisoners, Piri Beg made an unsuccessful attack on Hormuz. The Portuguese fleet pursued him, and he returned to Basra, with the enemy at his heels. Among the prisoners on his ship was the Portuguese Governor of Muscat, and, acting on his advice, Piri Beg left Basra with three galleys loaded with loot and plunder. He managed to evade the Portuguese fleet and sailed out of the Gulf, but he lost one of his ships, loaded with treasure, off Bahrain, and finally reached Egypt with the remaining two. History does not relate what happened to the Portuguese officer, but Piri Beg was eventually tried, convicted, and executed, and his vast wealth, most of which was accumulated by acts of piracy, was confiscated by the Sultan.

During the following years the Turks gained many successes in the Gulf. They captured and destroyed Kishm and twice occupied Muscat, but each time they were driven out by the Portuguese. In 1550 Katif, which was a place of importance, was ruled by a vassal of the King of Hormuz, who was subject to the King of Portugal. The people of Katif, assisted by the King of Hassa, rebelled against the Hormuzian rule, expelled the Governor, and appealed to the Turks for help. The Turks welcomed the opportunity of establishing themselves on the mainland of Arabia and sent a force from Basra which occupied the port. Their proximity was a serious danger to Bahrain, and in order to prevent its occupation by the Turks the Portuguese sent a force from Hormuz under Antonio da Naronah, who drove out the Turks, levelled the fortress of Katif to the ground, and re-installed the Hormuzian Governor.

By the middle of the sixteenth century the Turks were vigorously challenging the supremacy of the Portuguese in the Gulf. Sultan Suliman had ambitions which rivalled those of the Portuguese; he aimed at extending his realm throughout the Iranian Gulf, and he hoped to possess the western coast of India. The Portuguese ships were superior to those of the Turks, and their men were better armed, but the Turks enjoyed advantages over their adversaries in other ways. The religious sympathies of the people in the Gulf were with the Turks, and the Portuguese were regarded as infidels. The Turks were nearer to their

PORTUGUESE IN THE BAHRAIN ISLANDS, 1521-1602 627

base and less affected by climate and disease, and they had not been long enough in the Gulf to acquire the reputation for rapacity and cruelty which characterized the Portuguese.

In 1553 the Sultan appointed Sidi Ali Chalabi as Admiral of the Turkish fleet, with orders to recover the Turkish ships which had been abandoned in Basra after the piratical exploits of Piri Beg. Sidi Ali was a distinguished Turk, a poet, a writer on navigation, and a brave fighter. He wrote a book about his travels and adventures, in which he described his experiences in the Iranian Gulf. He travelled from Aleppo to Basra by land, a journey which took several months, and he took over charge of the ships at Basra from Murad Beg, formerly the Governor of Katif. After repairing and equipping the Turkish galleys, Sidi Ali set sail from Basra and cruised down the Gulf, visiting various ports, including Bushire, Katif and Bahrain. At the last place he stayed a little time. The islands were governed on behalf of the Portuguese by a local ruler, Rais Murad, who received Sidi Ali with friendliness and showed him, among other things, the strange springs of fresh water coming up from the bed of the sea. When Sidi Ali made enquiries about the Portuguese he received evasive answers.

On leaving Bahrain he met a strong Portuguese fleet in the neighbourhood of Muscat; there were twelve large ships of war and twenty-two smaller ones. Their mizzen sails were set and their gilded beak-heads, towering fore-castles, and masts gay with bunting obscured the horizon. Undaunted by their superior numbers, the gallant Turkish Admiral attacked the enemy. The ships bombarded each other with cannon; then they came closer, and the fighting men hurled down javelins and arrows from the high turrets while the sweating slaves tugged at the oars. Finally, they grappled and fell upon each other, fighting fiercely with swords and spears. Five Turkish galleys were destroyed, and there was great loss on both sides; many of the refugees landed on the shore, where they were hospitably treated by the natives, but eventually the remainder of the Turkish fleet made its way down the Gulf.

Shortly afterwards the Turks made a determined effort to capture Bahrain. In 1559 a powerful force of 1,300 Turks and Janissaries, in two galleys and seventy barques, was sent against the islands. Rais Murad was still the Governor, and the Portuguese sent a fleet from Hormuz to his assistance. On the way it met some Turkish ships and drove them on to the shore. The Turks had landed and besieged the fortress, and when the Portuguese arrived they had a council of war and decided to

175

[14]

628 PORTUGUESE IN THE BAHRAIN ISLANDS, 1521-1602

175 surround the besiegers. However, the Portuguese officers became impatient and forced an engagement. Rais Murad broke through the Turkish line with 300 well-armed men and joined the Portuguese, and together they routed the Turks. The Portuguese pursued the Turks, counting the victory already won, but the Turks rallied and fell on the Portuguese in an ambush, killing many of them, including their leader, Don Alvara da Silvera, whose body was never recovered from the enemy. A great number of the Portuguese were slain, and Rais Murad retired again to his fortress.

Pero Peixoto took command of the Portuguese, and while the guns of his ships cut off their retreat to the sea he launched another attack on the Turks, who finally surrendered. They were allowed to leave Bahrain on condition that they handed over their arms, prisoners and animals and ammunition, and ten thousand ducats. After this ignominious defeat the Turks retired to Basra, and the Portuguese re-established their authority over Bahrain.

During the second half of the sixteenth century there is very little recorded about Bahrain. A local Arab author states that the Portuguese repaired the fort in 1580 and that this date is inscribed on some stones in three of the four towers, but no such inscription exists now, although someone during recent years wrote this date in black paint on various places on the walls.

After 1580 the power of the Portuguese in the East began definitely to wane, mainly owing to the domination in Europe of Spain over Portugal, which lasted for sixty years. It was a disastrous period for the Portuguese; in India and the Persian Gulf they were threatened by the Turks, the Dutch, the French, and the English, who snatched from them most of their great Eastern empire. They were no longer able to sustain their garrisons, and, as the number and quality of the reinforcements dwindled, the Arabs and the Persians became more bold in opposing the tyranny of the infidel conquerors. The prestige of the Portuguese navy decreased; the captains of the fleets, who when they first arrived were almost invincible, began to "shirk encounters"; instead of confining their attention to fighting, they paid too much attention to enriching themselves by trade.

In 1602 the Portuguese were expelled from Bahrain by Iran, and an account of the incident is given at some length by a contemporary writer. The Governor of Bahrain, a relation of the King of Hormuz, treated the people of the islands with excessive harshness and oppression. His tyranny culminated in the murder of a wealthy and much-respected

PORTUGUESE IN THE BAHRAIN ISLANDS, 1521-1602 639

Bahrain pearl merchant, whose possessions, which included many valuable pearls, were seized by the Governor. The murder caused great indignation, but the people were too afraid to retaliate. The murdered merchant had a brother who was very devoted to him and who determined to avenge the murder. Concealing his feelings, he attached himself to the Governor and eventually managed to win his confidence so thoroughly that one day he got an opportunity and stabbed him to death with a dagger. Having done this, he proclaimed himself ruler and was joined by most of the local population. They overpowered the small Portuguese garrison and seized the fortress, and the Prince of Shiraz sent a force to assist the rebels and to take control of the islands in the name of the Shah of Iran. 175

Portugal and Iran at this time were outwardly on friendly terms, and a Portuguese mission was visiting Iran and endeavouring to persuade the Shah to join the Portuguese in fighting the Turks. If the mission achieved its object, the Portuguese would be free to deal with the Dutch, whose ships were "infesting the oceans." The King of Portugal remonstrated with the Shah of Iran at his unfriendly action in assisting the rebellion in Bahrain, but the latter made the flimsy excuse that he had not taken Bahrain from the Portuguese, but from a vassal of the King of Hormuz.

In spite of their difficulties, the Portuguese prepared to recover Bahrain, and the Governor of Hormuz, Don Pedro Contigno, appointed one of his officers, Captain Francisco da Soto Major, as the commander of a mixed force of Portuguese and Hormuzians, whose object was to prevent the Persians sending more troops to Bahrain and recapture the islands. Although they were joined by some troops and ships of war from India under Don George of Castel Bruno, the expedition was a weak one and the ships were undermanned.

The Governor of Hormuz "arranged all things well, with diligence and prudence, and without doubt he would have recovered Bahrain as he hoped, having acquired great reputation in all sea affairs," but unfortunately for him he had enemies at the court of the Viceroy at Goa who were intriguing against him. At this critical moment their intrigues bore fruit. He was suddenly dismissed from his command, which was not an unusual event, without even being given an opportunity to defend himself.

Diego Barrato, his successor, was a sick man, and on assuming command he found that the forces were severely depleted by disease and the need of taking away men to fight the Dutch. His second in com-

630 PORTUGUESE IN THE BAHRAIN ISLANDS, 1521-1602

175 mand, Gasper da Mello, made strenuous efforts to fit out the expedition, but with small success.

The ruler of Iran, the famous Shah Abbas, on hearing that the Portuguese were preparing to recover Bahrain, despatched a formidable army of five or six thousand men, under Adam Sultan, to threaten the Portuguese garrison in Gombrun (Bander Abbas) to divert the Portuguese from Bahrain, and the Portuguese mission in Iran sent one of its members post-haste to Hormuz to persuade his countrymen not to jeopardize the success of the negotiations by provoking a breach with Iran over the occupation of Bahrain. It is stated in a Portuguese history that Shah Abbas ordered that Bahrain should be restored to the Portuguese, but if this order was given it was not carried out. The Portuguese garrison in Gombrun mutinied and surrendered the town to the Persians, and eventually, partly for political reasons and partly because they were so hard-pressed, the Portuguese abandoned their project of an attack on Bahrain "for the pretensions of an island which we could easily conquer later on." But this was a vain boast; Bahrain was never again taken by Portugal, although for many years the King of Portugal continued to protest at the occupation of Bahrain by the Iranians, and on one occasion, in 1605, he ordered his Viceroy to make war on Bahrain by sea and by land and suggested that the Captain of the fort might be bribed to surrender. It was not until 1622, when the Portuguese lost Hormuz to an allied Iranian and English force, that they finally gave up all hope of recovering Bahrain.

2: Belgrave

MZ2 Bahrain MZ2

539

[For one of the folktales taken from a Shi'a local history of Bahrain about its occupation by the Portuguese, see category 173.]